

A BLUE AND WHITE FLYCATCHER (*FICEDULA CYANOMELANA*), A NEW BIRD FOR AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

On 5 December 1995 Grant and Clare Morton of Wickham, found a small dead bird on Settlers Beach, near Cossack, Western Australia. The bird was reasonably fresh and was found half way down the beach on an out-going tide. Realising that the bird could be an important find they contacted the Western Australian Museum and arranged to have it frozen and air freighted to Perth. Although just beginning to decay the bird was injected with formalin and prepared into a mummified specimen (registered number A26021) and identified on plumage characteristics as an adult male Blue and White Flycatcher *Ficedula cyanomelana cyanomelana* (Temminck).

DESCRIPTION

Adult male (based on specimen).

Forehead and crown bright blue or glossy blue; lore black; hindneck, back and rump purplish blue with bases of feathers black. Median upperwing coverts bright glossy blue, rest of wings black the outer webs of most feathers blue. Central

tail feathers black at base becoming dark blue distally; outer feathers white basally, black distally with blue outer web. Lores, cheeks, sides of neck, chin, throat and upper breast and flanks black; lower breast, belly and undertail coverts white. When viewed from below the tail looks white, with a sharply defined, broad black tip. Entire underwing blackish. Bill and legs black; colour of eye not noted but given in literature as dark brown (Figure 1). Total length 169 mm; weight 17.5 g; entire culmen 18.0 mm, exposed culmen 11.5 mm; culmen width 6.5 mm, depth 4.2 mm; wing 96 mm; tail 65 mm; tarsus 17 mm, depth 4.2 mm; middle toe and claw 17 mm.

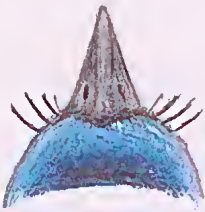
Adult female differs from male in having the upperparts olive brown, with rufous brown rump and upper tail coverts; tail dark brown, each feather with a rufous brown edge. Lores and eye ring buffy brown. Cheeks and side of neck olive brown. Chin and throat whitish brown. Upper breast and flanks a somewhat buffier shade of olive brown. Belly and undertail coverts white (Meyer De Schauensee 1984, LaTouche 1925) (Figure 1).

First winter
male



Adult
female





Dorsal view of
bill and tail



Adult
male

Figure 1. Plumages of the Blue and White Flycatcher *Ficedula c. cyanomelana* also showing details of the bill and tail from above.

Immature (first winter) male similar to female except for blue on the wings, rump and tail. These latter areas virtually as adult male, and some blue showing in the scapulars (Figure 1).

DISTRIBUTION

The nominate subspecies breeds in Japan and Korea, arriving in April and departing in October. It migrates south through the Japanese Islands, the Ryukyus, Seven Islands, Bonins and eastern China to South-East Asia, Philippines and Greater Sundas. It is a regular winter visitor up to 1400 m to north Borneo and less commonly elsewhere in Borneo. On Sumatra and west Java it is a rare winter visitor to sub-montane forests up to 1200 m (MacKinnon and Phillips 1993). It is not yet recorded on the Lesser Sunda Islands.

SUBSPECIES

The subspecies *F.c. cumatilis* breeds further west than the nominate form, extending to Manchuria, northern China and normally winters in Indo China, Malay Peninsula and Greater Sundas (where it is the more common subspecies).

Adult males of *F.c. cumatilis* are distinguishable from the nominate form in having the dark (slightly purplish) blue of the upperparts replaced by dull greenish blue, and the black on the sides of the face/breast etc. replaced by dark dull greenish blue (LaTouche 1925). Although typical males are distinguishable in the field, it should

be noted that intermediate forms have been recorded from the overlap zone, these previously named *F.c. intermedia*. Female *cumatilis* closely resemble the nominate form, being only slightly darker and would not be distinguishable in the field.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Adult male and first year male Blue and White Flycatchers are quite distinctive and should not be confused with any Australian species. The females would be easily recognised as a 'flycatcher' and with careful observation should also not be confused with any local species. Difficulties of identification arise mainly with other Asian species that may also occur here as vagrants namely the Siberian Blue Robin (*Luscinia cyane*) and the White-tailed Flycatcher (*Cyornis concreta*).

Despite the strikingly bi-coloured tail pattern of the adult male Blue and White Flycatcher, this can be difficult to see (except in flight) as the longest upper tail coverts and the relatively long wings often cover the white basal area. The bold tail pattern is often more conspicuous from below. The dull female on the other hand can be easily confused with several Asian species.

The Siberian Blue Robin also migrates to South-East Asia and the Greater Sundas. It resembles the Blue and White Flycatcher in virtually all plumages. The adult male is blue (although of a darker shade), but lacks the brighter blue forehead and wing coverts and the white base to the outer tail feathers.

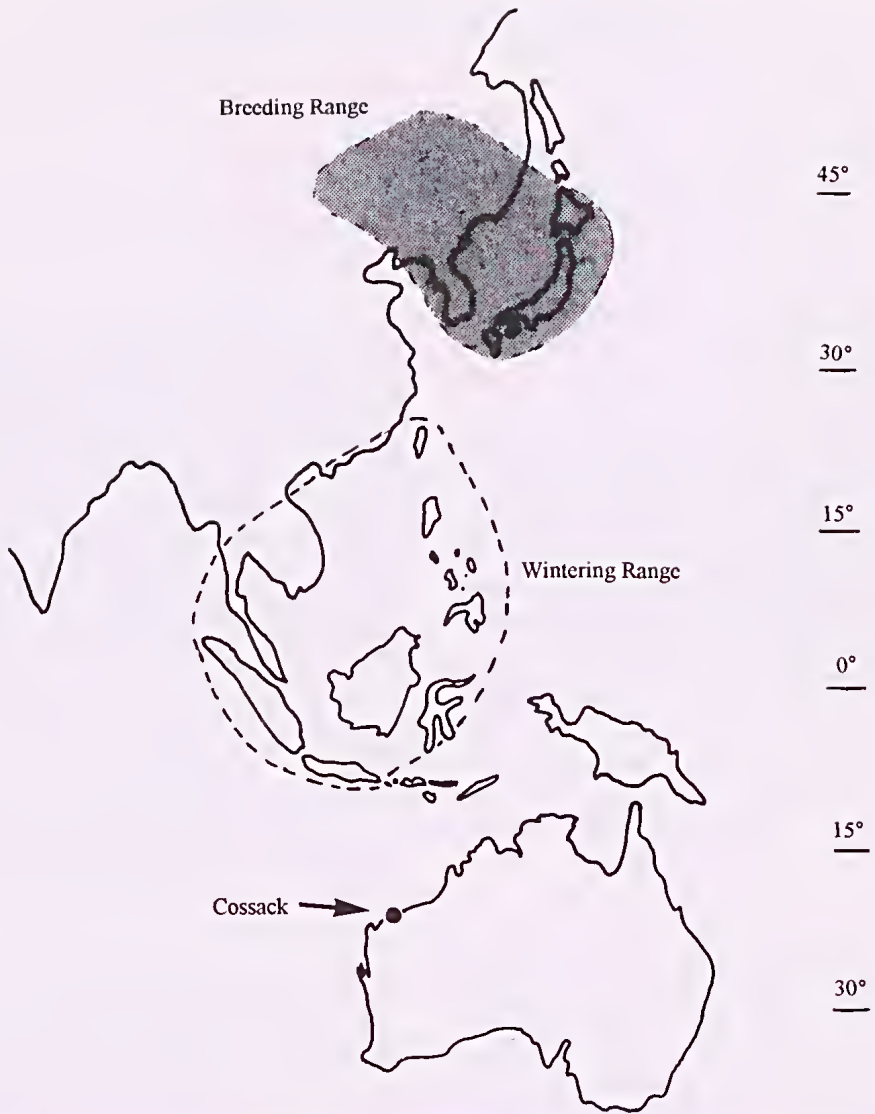


Figure 2. Map showing breeding and wintering range of Blue and White Flycatcher.

The central areas of the otherwise black chin, throat and breast etc are white, this joining up with the white belly. First year females are similar to female Blue and White Flycatchers but lack the rufous tone to the rump and upper tail

coverts, have rather scaly markings on the breast and show a broken bar across the wing (formed by the buffy tips of the greater wing coverts). Older females have the rump, upper tail coverts and tail blue, but differ from first winter

Blue and White Flycatchers in having the wings and scapulars brown. First winter males are somewhat intermediate between adult male and older females, being rather similar to the corresponding stage of the Blue and White Flycatcher, but again they lack any white in the tail, and have the greater wing coverts tipped with buff. At all stages this robin can be distinguished by its smaller size (14–15 cm) and by its pale fleshy pink legs.

The White-tailed Flycatcher differs in having in both the blue (male) and brown (female) plumages the white of the outer tail feathers extending to the tip. Also the male lacks the black face/throat/breast and the female has a distinctive white patch on the mid breast.

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